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DANIEL KUSEL ;
AN OUTSTANDING LAYMAN

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DANIEL KUSEL: AN OUTSTANDING LAYMAN

God has blessed our Synod with many fine men who have served congregations faithfully as pastors and have made our Synod run smoothly for many years as Synod officials. Today our Synod has a wide outreach which is due mainly to the grace of God working through these men who try to do things "decently and in order." From our early years as a small, German-Lutheran Synod until now many names of these called servants stand out. Some familiar names that are often mentioned are J. Bading, A. Hoenecke, A. Pieper, and O.J. Naumann, to name just a few. These men served faithfully in maintaining the Synod's firm position on doctrines and practices. We are thankful to God who in His grace gave us such devoted men. However, the history of the Wisconsin Synod doesn't end with references just to the trained workers of the Synod, nor indeed should our history end this way. For our Synod had many more people contribute to its history and these people are the laymen and laywomen who also worked hard to help establish our Synod.

The laypeople of our Synod can't be credited with the fine administration of the Synod or with the strict adherence to the doctrines of the Bible, but to these laypeople we, the trained workers, owe credit for the numerous gifts they gave both of their time and money. Not only is this fact true in our day, but it was especially true in the early days of our Synod. Just as some of those prominent names of early Synod officials mentioned above stand out, so also there are some noteworthy names of laymen that stand out. Some of these familiar names are Brumder, Gamm, and Kusel. This paper will concern itself with one of these three

men who was quite an outstanding layman, Mr. Daniel Kusel. The author wishes to write about this man not because he was more important than the other two mentioned, but because this man's history and achievements were of a more direct influence, in the author's opinion, on the Wisconsin Synod. All three men were on many committees in our Synod's early years and all three gave of their time and money, but Mr. Kusel was very influential in the history of Northwestern College. Therefore, our Synod was influenced greatly by this man because of his direct influence on our worker training program.

Biography

Daniel Kusel was born on August 30, 1811 in the town of Doenitz, Mecklenburg Germany.¹ One account lists his birth as being on August 27, 1811 but there are three other accounts which list the Aug. 30th date. His father was a wealthy cattle owner and land owner.² However, his son, Daniel did not follow in his father's footsteps. Instead Daniel took up the tin and brass trade and became a manufacturer of tin and brass. This business took Daniel from his homeland to Russia where he was an apprentice for a few years, and from Russia he went to Denmark where he continued learning his trade.³ It is not known when Daniel left Denmark, but in 1836 he is found back in his homeland where at this time he married his wife Dorthea. During the next twelve years God blessed Daniel and his wife with four children, three sons and a daughter. God also blessed him materially as we shall see later. In 1848 Daniel and his family were compelled to leave Germany because of the war going on at that time. If one looks at the records of any Wisconsin city of this time, one would find that many German people immigrated to America during the

years of 1848 and '49. So, in 1848 Daniel immigrated to America and headed for the city of Watertown. In April of 1849 he was already settled in Watertown and in this same year he started his hardware store and tin shop.⁴ In the book Jefferson County and its People it is reported that Kusel came to Watertown with three thousand dollars in gold.⁵ It is probably with this money that he started his store. He remained in Watertown for the rest of his life and died in the home of his daughter on Feb. 22, 1905.**His hardware store remained in the family for 125 years until it was sold in 1974, but it still bears the name of Kusel's Hardware Store and it is still in operation.

-Prominent Figure in Watertown-

During the years of 1848 and 1849 many people moved to Watertown and began to build their homes. Consequently, Kusel's hardware store saw a lot of business. Daniel Kusel became well known during these years and was respected by many people for his honesty and good business qualities. In 1864 Kusel sold his store to his sons Daniel Jr. and Fred Kusel. These two men were also well known in Watertown and Fred Kusel was a hometown hero because of his activity in the Civil War. In later years Fred Kusel held the office of mayor of Watertown four times and of state senator once. His entire family was active in the first German Lutheran Church in Watertown. In fact, Kusel was one of the founders of St. Mark's Church in 1850. All of the obituary columns of the local newspapers of that time mention this fact. Fifty-five years later in 1905 Kusel was St. Mark's

** There are a lot of different dates given for Kusel's death. The three local papers give this one, Feb. 22, 1905, but Kowalke lists a Feb. 21, 1904 date in his book. It would appear that Kowalke's date is wrong. Gemeindeblatt also lists the 1905 date.

oldest living member at 93 years.⁶ The newspapers of that time often wrote about Daniel Kusel and what he was doing. He was a close friend of Karl Schurz who at one time persuaded Kusel to stay in Watertown when Kusel wanted to move to Oshkosh.⁷ Our Synod can be thankful that Schurz did persuade Daniel Kusel to stay in Watertown, otherwise things might have gone differently for Northwestern College.

-Daniel Kusel and the Beginning of NWC-

When our Synod held its convention in 1863 at Grace Church in Milwaukee, there was one important question that stood before them, "Where do we start our college and seminary?" The Synod realized long before this convention that it needed a seminary and college to train men to preach the Gospel to the great amount of people entering Wisconsin. However, at this time they had not made the decision as to where that school would be. In this convention a debate ensued among the men present for a suitable site for the school. Several of the pastors and delegates from Milwaukee thought that their city would be the best place for the school, while others claimed that Watertown would be the best site. In the end the vote was 45 to 19 in favor of Watertown.

Those in favor of Milwaukee claimed that their city would be able to furnish more support than any other city. They also claimed that in Germany pastors received their training in larger cities. There were other arguments in defense of Milwaukee, but they weren't as good as the arguments for Watertown. First of all, Watertown as a city had a good central location in Wisconsin. Secondly, Watertown had more land available. Thirdly, the congregations in Watertown and its vicinity

weren't supporting other institutions such as hospitals like the Milwaukee congregations were doing at that time. It is important to note here that Kusel reported during this debate that he was certain some suitable property could be found in Watertown.⁸ It seems as if Kusel had already looked into some land or else he already had the land pictured in his mind.

The proceedings of this convention don't record all that was said on the issue, but the accounts of other authors who have written about Kusel all draw this same conclusion, Daniel Kusel played a major role in getting Northwestern College established in Watertown. Dr. Kiesling writes in his book, "Kusel was influential in having Northwestern College located in Watertown instead of in Milwaukee."⁹ The Watertown Republican in its obituary on Kusel recorded, "He was a strong supporter of NWU. This is shown in his untiring efforts to aid in securing the location at Watertown of NWU."¹⁰ The Watertown Gazette wrote this, "He took a lively interest in the college and was prominent in obtaining its location here in Watertown."¹¹ Thus, one can see that Daniel Kusel was in favor of a college in Watertown.

One can almost imagine Kusel talking to Mr. Richards about the purchase of his property for the Synod or urging the members of St. Mark's to support the college with their food-stuffs. He was a man who wanted his Synod to succeed in its efforts and he wanted his town to have the certain benefits that a college and a seminary would bring. He was one of those German pioneers who greatly influenced the early days of the town he lived in and more importantly the Synod he belonged to.

-Kusel and the Kaffeemuehle-

The effort of Daniel Kusel was revealed most in the organization and building of the first structure on what is now the campus of Northwestern College. They used to call this first building the "Old Kaffeemuehle," or the old coffee grinder because of the building's appearance of a coffee grinder. Yet, when it was first built, this building was the largest in Watertown and since it was new it was probably an attractive addition to the city. Groundbreaking for this structure was held on August 10, 1864. The Synod had okayed the purchase of 5 acres from Mr. Richards in 1863 and in 1864 they okayed the building of a functional structure for the college.

This first building has a considerable amount of history behind it. Our Synod was not able to produce the money needed for the structure from its own pocket, so, Pres. Bading traveled to Germany to obtain funds for the school and its first building. The reception he received over in Germany was very warm and productive for our Synod. Bading had come from Germany and was well known there. When he returned there after his stay in a strange place called Wisconsin, many people were anxious to hear his reports. Many different mission societies gave money for the school. When Bading returned to Wisconsin, he had about \$13,000 with him for the Synod and the school.

Almost at once Synod appropriated \$10,000 from this money for the building of a structure on the five acres in Watertown. They were very adamant in their resolutions that the building costs should not exceed \$10,000.¹² The Seminary and College already had a Board of Trustees and it was up to them to over-

see the expenditures for the building. Since Daniel Kusel was a charter member of the first Board of Trustees and the only layman, the other members of that Board looked to him for advice. Kusel had the experience needed since he was a hardware merchant who obviously knew the materials needed for such a building and since he had already built a house on main street in Watertown. This house is reported as having been one of the first "magnificent" houses in Watertown. 13

God had indeed blessed our Synod with this layman who gave of his time and zealous effort in this building. We can be sure that Kusel did act in such a way for two reasons. First of all, Synod records show that Kusel was thanked for his effort. Secondly, in 1864 Daniel Kusel sold his hardware store to his sons Daniel Jr. and Fred. After he had done this he had extra time to spare for the first building of the college. Kusel probably didn't sell his store just so he could work on that building, but, he had a greater opportunity to do so when his sons took over. At this time he was 53 yrs. old, which was good age for him to let his sons, who were in their mid-twenties, take over and it was a good age for someone with experience to oversee a building project.

Not only was Kusel's experience of utmost importance to that project, but also his connections with a hardware store and the people of Watertown. For in 1864 the Civil War was still in full swing and war time is not the best time to obtain materials and labor. Prof. Kowalke mentions this fact in his book Centennial Story, "These were war times and hard times and there were periods when the whole responsibility of pro-

viding materials and paying the workmen rested on his
(Kusel's) shoulders.¹⁴ Dr. A. Ernst, who wrote the obituary
column for D. Kusel in the March 15, 1905 "Gemeindeblatt"
added this point also, "In the Civil War, he (Kusel) used
his own effort and offerings, and let nothing trouble him
for the erection of the first building at our institution in
Watertown."¹⁵ When Kusel sold his store to his sons in 1864,
he must not have been thinking about the relaxing days of
retirement. In almost every reference made to him by our
Synod or the newspapers, this fact comes out again and again
that Kusel was an active, zealous man. He saw to it that the
materials were available and he found the laborers, carpenters,
and other skilled workers for the project. There is no doubt
in this author's mind that Kusel probably labored on the
building himself. He was an expert in the manufacturing of
tin and brass and when those materials were used in the build-
ing, he probably installed or helped install such materials.

At the 1865 Synod Convention in Watertown, Daniel Kusel
was thanked for his efforts. In the seventh session it was
resolved, "Dass Herr D. Kusel der wärmste Dank der Synoder für
seine aufopfernde Thatigkeit für das Seminar ausgesprochen
werde."¹⁶ Kusel was also asked to give an overall report
about the expenditures for the Seminary building. This re-
port is not contained in those proceedings but was probably
handed in at some later date. Thus, it was due to Kusel's
time and effort that the building of the first structure at
Northwestern took place. Although there was some discussion
in 1865 concerning the cost of the building being more than

anticipated, still no blame was placed on Mr. Kusel, but rather the warmest thanks was given.

-Daniel Kusel's *Financial aid* to our Synod-

In 1865 the college and seminary began their classes in the new building. The students lived in this building, studied there and also ate their meals in it. All in all, the school had a good start. However, there was one big problem, money! Synod had used most of the money collected in Germany by Pres. Bading for the new building. From 1865-1870, Synod felt the growing pains of having to operate a college and seminary. During these years Synod also began to develop a more confessional Lutheran stance. Since most of the mission societies belonged to the Prussian Union, our Synod's strict Lutheran stance offended the mission societies who had generously supported our Synod. By 1867 our position was firmly set and the unionistic mission societies stopped sending money. Northwestern felt the pinch from this lack of money.

Daniel Kusel again was active in the area of our Synod's financial problems. From the years of 1864-1867, Kusel held the office of "Schatzmeister" or treasurer of Synod. This office equipped him with the knowledge of Synod's money problems. Such knowledge moved him to hold back asking Synod to pay back the money it owed him from that first building. In fact, for six years, until 1870, Kusel allowed the debt to remain without asking any interest on this loan or demanding its payment. The Synod didn't forget this loan either, but

it was reported at every Convention up until 1870. It is true that other lay people had loaned money to Synod but none of them were as much as Kusel's loan. The Synod owed him \$1500.00 which was a considerable amount of money for that time. Kowalke, in his book Centennial Story states that Synod owed Kusel much more than \$1500.00; in fact, he quotes a figure of almost \$2000.00.¹⁷ This figure was probably correct since the college gave Kusel one of the \$500 scholarships which the college was selling to obtain some capital. During these first few difficult years it was men like Daniel Kusel who helped our Synod to keep its head above water insofar as money problems are concerned.

- *Other Activities* of Kusel in Synod-

In the 1860's, Synod called on Mr. Kusel many times for his services. They recognized his desire to serve his Lord in different areas. In 1867, Kusel was asked to join a group of delegates that would visit the Convention of the General Synod.¹⁸ In 1866 and 1867, Kusel was on the committee which researched the new hymnals that Synod wanted to use.¹⁹ Apparently a lot of research went into these hymnals for there was a five man committee appointed to look into them and two reports given, one in 1866 and one in 1877. Kusel was also active in another project for the college in the 1870's. In 1874, the college needed to build a new dormitory and some extra funds were needed for this project. Some of the funds came from private loans, while the college decided to sell some of its property along Main Street to obtain the rest of

the money. The college asked Mr. Kusel to lay out the lots measuring 50x50 feet on that part of land.²⁰ Obviously, some of these activities might not seem to be that important, but they illustrate this point that Daniel Kusel was active in the college's early years and in our Synod's early years. By just being on the first college Board, he had a lot to do with the decisions that would influence the college greatly in those first few years. In the 1860's alone, he was a delegate to four Synod Conventions and he was on a committee each of those years. From 1864-1867 he also served as treasurer, which undoubtedly involved quite a bit of work. In 1867 Kusel left the college Board due to old age, but he was named an honorary member and still held a lively interest in the college.²¹ Thus, for more than ten years, D. Kusel had a direct influence on our Synod and its operations.

In 1905 when Kusel died at the age of 93, the students of N.W.C. followed Mr. Kusel's casket in a procession to the cemetery.²² In those days the students didn't have enough money to give memorials, but rather used this practice to honor the dead. In all truth, this was only proper that the college should take time out for a man who gave to their institution a great deal of his time, money and zealous effort. Daniel Kusel is one man in a long list of laymen who have helped our Synod. In fact, in reality the laypeople of our Synod have played just as a significant role as the clergy has in our Synod. Yet, one dare not hold one above the other.

Throughout the years God has blessed our Synod with zealous workers who have been pastors and laymen. Sometimes the laymen may not be recognized as much for their work, but, then again, the same is true for some officials and pastors of the Synod. This fact is also obvious that neither the zealousness of pastor or layman is for his own glory but done out of love for God. Daniel Kusel was also motivated by the love of God to work for His glory during his life on this earth and he had a strong desire to be with his Savior. Dr. Ernst, in his obituary column, sums it up best. He wrote this about Kusel, "Im Glauben stand er fest. Er hatte Lust abzuschneiden und bei Christe zu sein."²³

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